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HEROES

CHAPTER 72

PAST EXPERIENCE

When a new assignment disappoints, Kimiko Nakamura reaches back to her past to learn a lesson from one of the world's greatest heroes.

PAST EXPERIENCE

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COMICRAFT *Lettering* An ASPEN M.L.T. *Production*

TO CALL *IKEBANA* THE ACT OF ARRANGING FLOWERS WOULD BE TO LIKEN POETRY TO A GROCERY LIST.

IN TRUTH, IT IS AN EXPRESSION OF THE SOUL, A MEANS BY WHICH TO CONVEY THE WONDROUS BEAUTY AND SPIRITUAL ESSENCE OF NATURE.

THROUGH ITS DESIGN, ONE COULD SPEAK DIRECTLY TO THE HEART OF THE VIEWER WHO SAW IT.

BUT, NONE OF THAT MATTERED.

NOT TO MY FATHER. HE CARED NOTHING FOR THE BEAUTY IN THIS WORLD.

INSTEAD, HE LIVED IN THE PAST...RECOUNTING THE GLORY OF WARRIORS AND THEIR VICTORIES ON ANCIENT BATTLEFIELDS.

...LED BY **TAKEZO KENSEI**, THE GREATEST HERO IN ALL OF JAPAN, THE SAMURAI ARMY DEFEATED ONI OF TOTTORI.

IT WAS AFTER THIS FIERCE BATTLE THAT TWO SAMURAI BEGAN FEUDING OVER THE SWORD OF ONI. EACH CLAIMED TO HAVE KILLED THIRTY-SEVEN WARRIORS OF THE ENEMY ARMY; AND THEREFORE, EACH CLAIMED THE BLADE AS A PRIZE FOR THEIR VALOR.



TAKEZO STEPPED BETWEEN THE TWO SAMURAI, FROWNING UPON THEIR SELFISH BEHAVIOR. "YOU MAY WEAR THE UNIFORM OF THE SAMURAI, BUT YOU BICKER LIKE CHILDREN," KENSEI SAID.

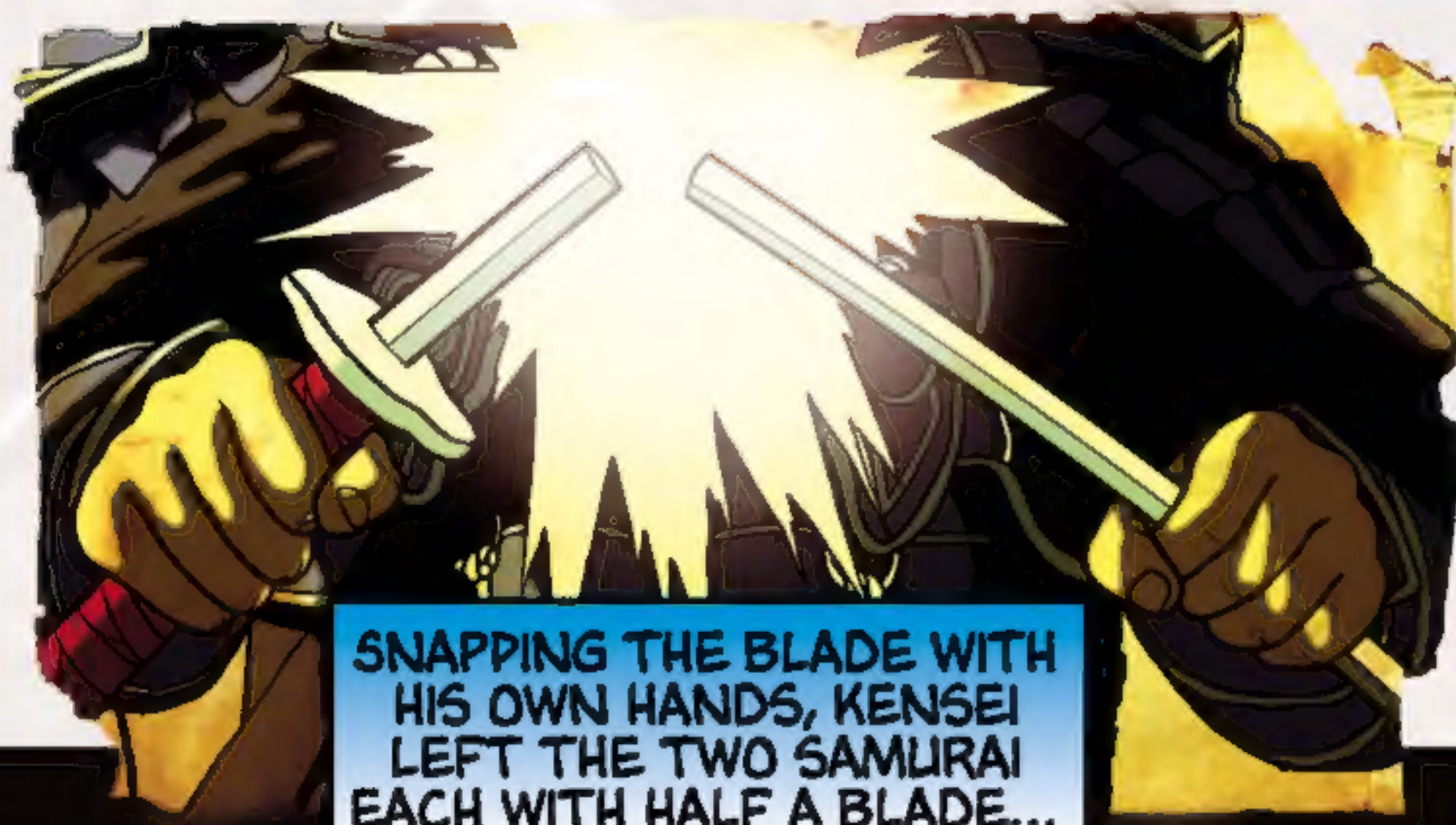


"TRUE, EACH OF YOU FOUGHT VALIANTLY AGAINST THIS LATEST ENEMY TO JAPAN, BUT IN FIGHTING NOW WITH ONE ANOTHER, YOU DISHONOR YOURSELVES AND YOUR STANDING. USING YOUR LOGIC, THE SWORD SHOULD BELONG TO ME FOR I SLEW TWICE AS MANY ENEMIES AS EITHER OF YOU."



"BUT DOES THE SAMURAI WHO KILLS A HUNDRED ON THE BATTLEFIELD DESERVE MORE HONOR...MORE GLORY THAN THE BOY WHO SLAYS BUT ONE?"

"IT IS ONLY TOGETHER THAT WE WIN. THERE IS NO INDIVIDUAL. THERE IS ONLY JAPAN."



SNAPPING THE BLADE WITH HIS OWN HANDS, KENSEI LEFT THE TWO SAMURAI EACH WITH HALF A BLADE...



...A REMINDER FOR THE REST OF THEIR DAYS OF HOW THEIR PRIDE HAD DAMAGED THEIR HONOR.



YOU SEE, *HIRO*, HOW THE GREAT TAKEZO KENSEI ALWAYS PUSHED FORWARD, NEVER SETTLING FOR FAILURE...IN HIMSELF OR IN OTHERS.

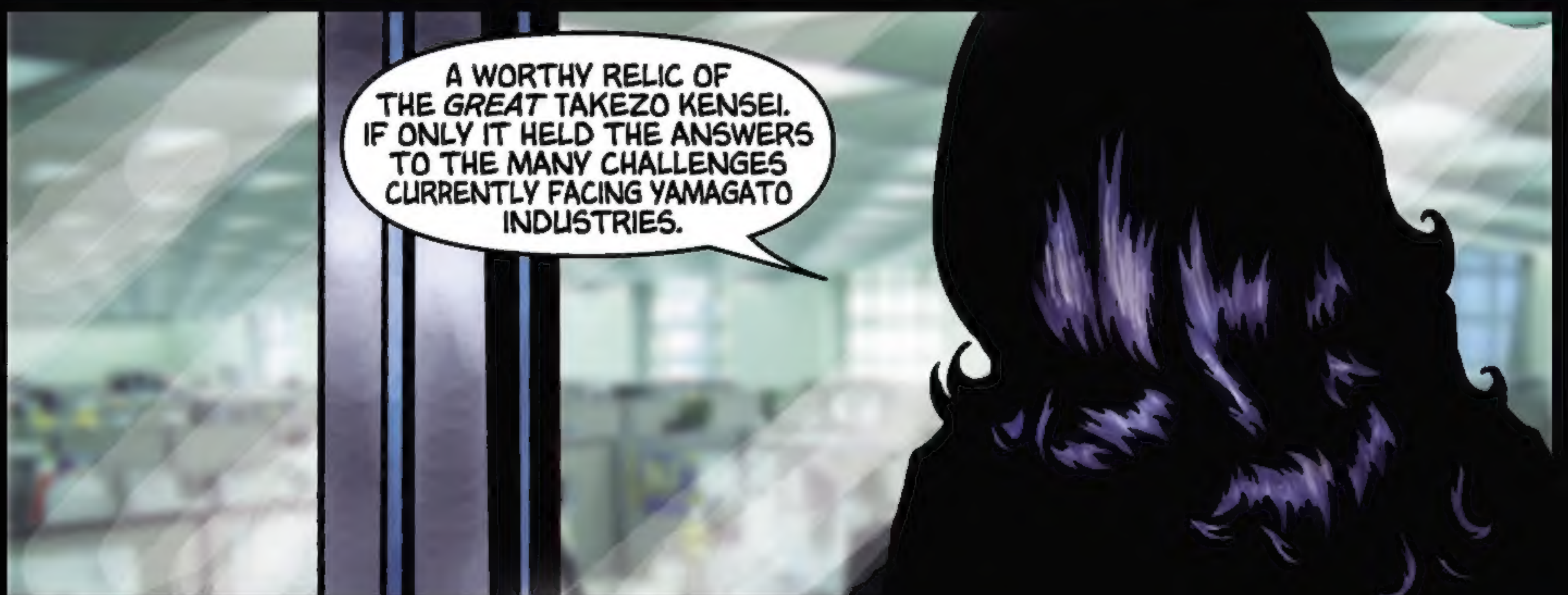




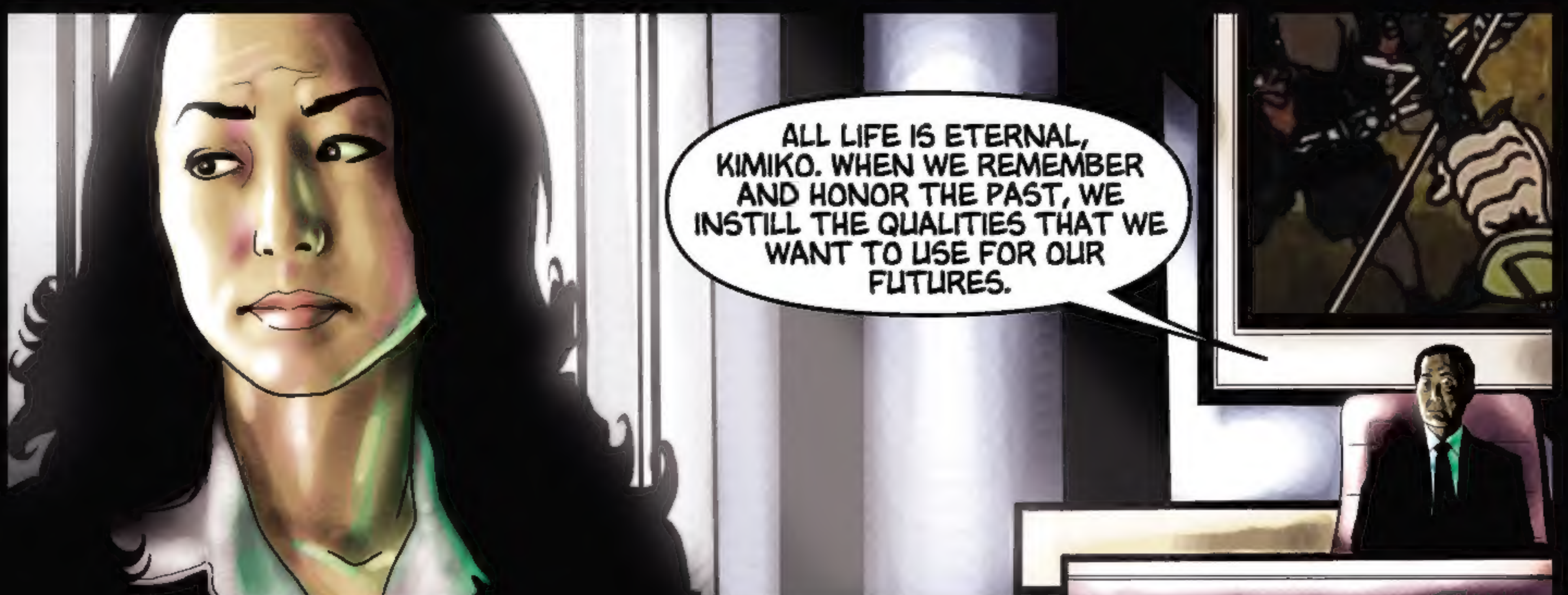
IMPRESSIVE,
ISN'T IT?



SUCH AN
IMPORTANT
PIECE...



A WORTHY RELIC OF
THE GREAT TAKEZO KENSEI.
IF ONLY IT HELD THE ANSWERS
TO THE MANY CHALLENGES
CURRENTLY FACING YAMAGATO
INDUSTRIES.



ALL LIFE IS ETERNAL,
KIMIKO. WHEN WE REMEMBER
AND HONOR THE PAST, WE
INSTILL THE QUALITIES THAT WE
WANT TO USE FOR OUR
FUTURES.



WHEN HE DIED, I WAS DEEPLY SADDENED BY THE LOSS.



BUT, I ALSO BELIEVED MY FATHER WAS HAPPIER NOW THAT HE COULD STAND BESIDE HIS HERO IN THE AFTERLIFE.



KIMIKO, PLEASE FORGIVE THE TIMING OF MY ADDRESS TO DISCUSS YAMAGATO INDUSTRIES, BUT THE BUSINESS WORLD STOPS FOR NO MAN...EVEN ONE AS GREAT AS YOUR FATHER.

KNOWING MY FATHER, *KIN*, I AM SURE HE WOULD ADMIRE YOUR DEDICATION TO HIS LEGACY. I KNOW WE HAVE MUCH WORK AHEAD OF US, AND I AM READY TO TAKE THE MANTLE.



ACTUALLY, KIMIKO, IT IS HIS LEGACY PROJECT THAT NOW SUFFERS FROM A LACK OF LEADERSHIP...

...THE YAMAGATO FELLOWSHIP.



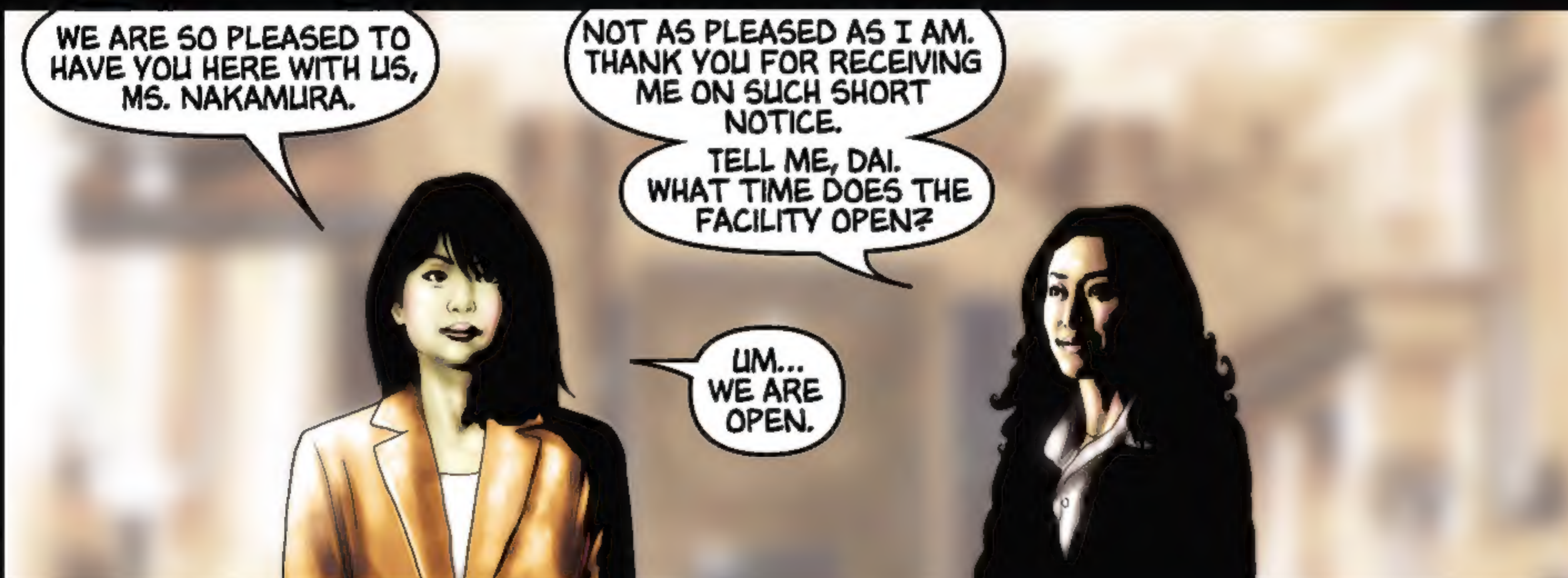


MY FATHER'S INTENTIONS FOR MY ROLE AT YAMAGATO INDUSTRIES WERE CLEAR -- TO TAKE OVER THE POSITION THAT HE HELD...NOT TO BABYSIT HIS HOBBY.



BUT THAT IS PRECISELY WHY THOSE WITHIN THE COMPANY HAVE SENT ME HERE -- TO DISTRACT MY ATTENTION WITH MY FATHER'S OBSESSION WHILE THEY WORK TO USURP MY RIGHTFUL PLACE IN HIS CHAIR.

By looking into the past, it's our hope that we will be better equipped to identify and inspire the heroes walking among us today.



WE ARE SO PLEASED TO HAVE YOU HERE WITH US, MS. NAKAMLIRA.

NOT AS PLEASED AS I AM. THANK YOU FOR RECEIVING ME ON SUCH SHORT NOTICE.

TELL ME, DAI. WHAT TIME DOES THE FACILITY OPEN?

UM... WE ARE OPEN.



I SEE.

WITHOUT MY FATHER PRAISING YOU, YOUR MEMORY APPEARS TO FALL ON DEAF EARS, KENSEI. IT SEEMS NOBODY ELSE IS INTERESTED IN YOU OR YOUR ADVENTURES.

PERHAPS IT IS TIME FOR YOU TO FIND A NEW HOME IN OBSCURITY.

I HAD NO INTENTION OF BEING EXILED FROM MY POSITION. I NEEDED TO BE STRONG...FOR MY FATHER AND FOR THE COMPANY ITSELF.

KIMIKO NAKAMURA
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

SHOURAI SENT THIS NEW PDA IN APPRECIATION FOR OUR CONTINUED SERVICE OF THEIR NEEDS. BEING THE PRIMARY EXECUTIVE FOR THEIR ACCOUNT, NATURALLY IT SHOULD GO TO ME.

HAI, JIRO IS THE PRIMARY EXECUTIVE; HOWEVER, THE GIFT WAS ADDRESSED TO ME FOR MY EFFORTS IN OUR LATEST MATTER. MS. NAKAMURA, SURELY IT WAS SHOURAI'S DESIRE FOR ME TO RECEIVE THE GIFT.

AS I LOOKED UPON THE FIGURE THAT I HAD DESPISED SINCE CHILDHOOD, I FINALLY REALIZED WHAT MY FATHER HAD MEANT ALL THOSE YEARS.

THE PAST...IT
COULD SHOW
ME THE WAY.

YES, JIRO AND TARO, YOU BOTH SERVE SHOURAI WELL. BUT DO YOU NOT RELY UPON EACH OTHER? AND THE RESEARCHERS, ACCOUNTANTS, AND ADMINISTRATORS? AS WELL AS THE BOARD MEMBERS OF YAMAGATO INDUSTRIES THEMSELVES?

YOU BOTH SADDEN ME WITH YOUR PETTINESS, AND YOU SHAME YOURSELVES.

THIS IS NO PLACE FOR SUCH BEHAVIOR. YOU MUST LEARN THAT THERE IS NO JIRO OR TARO HERE...

THERE IS ONLY
YAMAGATO!

THAT'S RIGHT, DAI...BIG PLANS. WE WILL EXPAND THE YAMAGATO FELLOWSHIP ONLINE TO SPREAD OUR MESSAGE ABOUT THE POWER AND IMPORTANCE OF *HEROES* TO THE WORLD. IF WE CANNOT BRING THE PEOPLE TO THE FELLOWSHIP, THEN WE SHALL BRING THE FELLOWSHIP TO THEM.

YES, A DAUNTING TASK, BUT MY FATHER NEVER SETTLED FOR FAILURE...AND NEITHER WILL I.

END